

Calling on God in Truth—Elijah by the Brook of Kerith

Last Sunday, I handed out some little slips of Scripture to each one of those who were here. And I handed them out randomly. Now, although I handed them out randomly from my perspective, that doesn't mean that you necessarily received them randomly. It could well be that that little slip of Scripture was the very one intended for you because God doesn't act randomly. After all God's Word teaches that there are no truly random events when it says: "We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall." Proverbs 16:33 (NLT2) And so, with that thought in mind, I examined my own verse—you see, I took the last one in the deck. It was Psalm 145:18 which in the NIV reads as follows: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." Now, I was thinking about this verse last Sunday night and felt like God wanted me to preach on that verse. But, when I tried to get my thoughts together to do exactly that, I just couldn't seem to move things forward. And so, I decided that I was probably supposed to look elsewhere in God's Word for a sermon topic. I can't say why, but somehow the Prophet Elijah came to mind. And so, I turned to 1st Kings and began to read Elijah's story, and when I did, the thoughts expressed by David in my verse—the one in Psalm 145:18—kept popping up all over the place. And, knowing that God dealt that verse to me, that's when this sermon was born.

So, this morning, let's consider the first seven verses of 1st Kings, chapter 17, that introduces Elijah as a true man of God. And as we do, we need to compare what Elijah experienced to those words presented in my slip of Scripture from Psalm 145. With that in mind, this is what 1st Kings has to tell us as it introduces the Prophet Elijah: ¹ Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!" 1 Kings 17:1 (NLT2)

Just to give this a little context, note that Elijah springs forth during King Ahab's reign. Ahab was the seventh king of Israel's Northern Kingdom during the 9th century B.C. He took on the infamous Jezebel, who was a Phoenician princess, as his wicked wife. Consequently, Israel suffered a great deal of spiritual decline during his 22-year reign because Ahab allowed the people to worship the pagan god, Baal.¹ And God sent Elijah as a warning to Ahab that he and Israel needed to repent of this Baal worship. And it was indeed a severe warning, because Elijah told the king that there wouldn't be any dew or rain in the land for the next few years. That was really bad news, because in a climate like that of Palestine, the lack of any such moisture, for even a couple years, would cause a devastating and deadly drought. There is something else you need to be aware of here. God didn't just pick a drought as a random kind of disaster as opposed to a flood or an earthquake, etc. Rather, a drought was specifically chosen as the desired disaster because it was a direct challenge to Baal. You see, Baal was supposed to be the great god of rain and fertility of the crops. In fact, archaeologists have even unearthed pagan drawings of Baal with a thunderbolt in his hand, symbolizing his supposed control over the weather. And so, to refute this pagan belief, Elijah delivered God's message that only the true God of Israel controls the weather, not some idol made of stone and wood.²

And it is here, in this passage concerning Elijah, that we first see something of what David was talking about in Psalm 145:18. David assures us that God is near to all who call on Him in “*truth*.” So what does it mean to *call upon God in truth*? Well, it must surely be something of great importance because when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, it’s very close to what He told her. In John’s Gospel, Jesus told the Samaritan woman: ²³ “But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father *IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH*. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship *IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH*.” John 4:23-24 (HCSB)

What Elijah and Jesus were emphasizing here is that in order to approach God *in truth*, whether you are calling upon Him in prayer, or coming into His presence to worship, you must be acting with a *spiritual earnestness* as to *Who God really is*. Elijah’s own declaration to Ahab proclaimed this essential truth. Specifically, Elijah prophesied this drought in the name of the *truly living God*. Elijah did this for a reason. He did this to reflect his own *spiritual earnestness* and his *faith* in the only living God. And so, Elijah acknowledges the reality of God’s active, sovereign power over all things as the living Creator of the universe. Here, Elijah is not merely giving an opinion with his mouth. He is not just going through the motions and delivering this message with a half-hearted meekness. Rather, Elijah is stating a defiant fact from the depths of his soul, and he made this declaration right to Ahab’s face—God was going to stop it from raining for a very long time and no puny Baal idol was going to stop Him! As such, this very act of delivering this prophecy to the wicked Ahab, perhaps is the very presence of his even more wicked wife, Jezebel, was an *act of spiritual worship*. Why?—because it reflected Elijah’s faith and trust in the Living God who would, in fact, make good on this warning of impending doom. And, of course, God did exactly that because it would not rain again for another 3 plus years.

So, how does this relate back to Psalm 145 and that verse found on that little scrap of paper that ended up my hands last Sunday morning? Well, Psalm 145:18 assures us that if we do call upon God *in truth*, then God will be “*near*” to us. What does that mean?—God will be *near* to us. This isn’t talking about any spatial distance, as if to say “God is *near* as opposed to being *far away* from us.” There’s no spatial dimension to this at all—rather, it is a purely *spiritual dimension*. And that spiritual dimension is bound up in the fact that God wants to be “*near*” to you in the sense that *God wants to be your friend*.³ A friend is *near* when the going gets tough. A friend helps you out in times of trouble. And that is what God is—*He is our best friend* in times of need. In other words, God wants to have a *spiritual relationship* with you as your *sustainer* and *provider*. But that can only happen if you *call upon Him in truth*. And to do that, you must *trust* in what He says. You must call upon God with confidence in both His *means* to provide and His *willingness* in coming through to provide whatever your need may be.

Now, with this in mind, how did Elijah fare in trusting God to provide? Consider the following as Elijah’s story in 1st Kings continues: ² Then the LORD said to Elijah, ³ “Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. ⁴ Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food.” 1 Kings 17:2-4 (NLT2) Humm... Think about what God is saying here from Elijah’s perspective. Try to put yourself in

Elijah's shoes. From Elijah's point of view, God is telling him that he must go into hiding, presumably because Ahab and Jezebel became so enraged by Elijah's prophecy that they were intent upon killing him. That, of course, is bad news—an evil king and queen with all their military might and resources wanted him dead. Now, if you have to go into hiding from people like that, well, you would want to go somewhere really safe—like a mighty fortress. And if you had to hide, in what was going to be a time of absolute drought, you'd want to be with the kind of people who you could depend upon in providing food and water. And yet, what God told Elijah was essentially something like this: "Here's the plan: There's a little brook called Kerith that I want you to go to. There will be a little bit of water there. And I am going to make sure you get fed because the ravens are going to see to that. So, take off Elijah—you'll be just fine!"

Now, if that were you and I, what would we have been thinking—having heard such a plan from God? I know what we would have thought. We would have said to ourselves: "Now, wait a minute! You mean you aren't going to send me to some strong fort with high walls and lots of guards to protect me from the likes of Ahab and Jezebel? You aren't going to send me to a place with the deepest of wells with an inexhaustible supply of water—even in times of drought? God, don't you know that little brooks are the first thing to dry up in times of drought? And what is all this stuff about ravens?—They are the most unreliable birds of all—many times they don't even take good care of their young—how is it that they are going to feed me? And my goodness, Lord—you have declared these birds to be unclean⁴ because ravens are birds who eat carrion—what are they going to bring to me?—Road-kill?"

Those may have been some of the things that would have crossed our minds—But, not so with Elijah. You see, Elijah would one day stand along with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus⁵—and you don't get to stand in places like that with those kinds of doubtful thoughts. Elijah thought like David did in Psalm 145. Elijah thought—no, he knew with complete confidence—that "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." Psalm 145:18 (NIV) And the Lord was near to Elijah there by the Brook of Kerith, because those ravens did come with food, and the water from the brook did actually sustain him. You see, Elijah knew something that Jesus would later tell His disciples.

While Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, His disciples came back from town, and they knew that Jesus had gone all day without having anything to eat. And so they urged Jesus take some food. John's Gospel tells us: ³² But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about." ³³ "Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other. ³⁴ Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent Me, and from finishing His work." John 4:32-34 (NLT2) And not only that, but before His disciples arrived, Jesus had told the Samaritan woman something about water. She came to fetch her daily supply of very ordinary water from the well. But, Jesus offered her of a very different kind of water and explained: "Anyone who drinks [your] water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴ But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life." John 4:13-14 (NLT2)

Elijah was a remarkable man because almost 900 years before Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, Elijah knew something about this spiritual food and spiritual water that Jesus would speak about nine centuries later. It is the kind

of food and water that produces the *spiritual earnest* that Elijah possessed. Now, you might respond by saying, “Yes, but we are not Elijah—how can we have faith like that when we are so broken and crushed by the things of this life that befall us?” But again, the Psalms give us the answer. Psalm 145 assures us that God will be near to us if we sincerely open our hearts to Him in times of trouble. And even more to the point, in Psalm 34 it assures us: “The LORD is NEAR the brokenhearted; He saves those crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18 (HCSB)

But, take notice that it is not only God who comes near to you. You have a responsibility as well. You need to come near to God. Jesus’ brother, the Apostle James, reminds us that that we must: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” James 4:8 (NASB) God offers His grace to you, but you must respond. And the only proper response is *faith in His Son, Jesus Christ*. When God told Elijah that the best thing for him to do was to head to the Brook of Kerith and let the ravens take care of him, what was Elijah’s response? Well, actually, he didn’t make a response—not a verbal one anyway. Verse 5 simply states: “So Elijah did as the LORD told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan.” 1 Kings 17:5 (NLT2) As far as Elijah was concerned if he just called upon the Lord in truth—which Elijah did by his actions in trusting God—the Lord would be near to him. The Lord would be his friend. The Lord would provide. The Lord would be on his side. Elijah would have been in complete agreement with Paul in saying, “If God is on our side, who can ever be against us?” Romans 8:31 (TLB) It didn’t matter who came after him—Ahab, Jezebel or Satan himself—Elijah knew that God was on his side, and because of that reality, no one could harm him.

But, how did Elijah come to be on God’s side? He didn’t come to be there by shirking in the shadows. He didn’t come to be on God’s side by denying God, but by defiantly proclaiming His Lord to be the *Living God*—and by shouting it in the royal courts of Ahab and into the ears of Jezebel—He did it by following God’s plan for his survival, even when that plan may not have made sense to him. And how did that plan work out for Elijah? Verse 6 pretty much bears out God’s faithfulness because it tells us that: “The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening [just as God said they would], and he drank from the brook [even in a time of great drought].” 1 Kings 17:5-6 (NLT2)

What about you? Do you call upon God in truth? Do you allow God to draw near to you—so near that you allow Him into your heart? And do you, in turn, draw near to God by responding to His offer of grace and having faith in His Son, Jesus Christ? The same God who spoke to Elijah, speaks to you as well. He assures you that He has a plan for your welfare and security, just as He had one for Elijah. Will you turn from the food and water of this world to partake of a better *spiritual diet*—the eternal one composed of the *Bread of Life* and the *Living Water* of Jesus Christ? Maybe you are living in a time of a terrible drought—only it isn’t a dry land that torments you, but a drained and depleted soul instead. Maybe you are going through those times of *spiritual drought* in which you thirst for some kind of relief, some refreshment to restore your tired and battered soul. Know that God will provide a Brook of Kerith for you during those trying times of times in life.⁶ How can you find your way to such a brook and drink in and touch its cool and healing waters? God tells us the way to that brook. God’s way is the way of faith and trust⁷—just call upon him, as David says, *in truth—knowing that He cares and He will provide*. If you will just do that, with complete spiritual earnestness, then God will respond, for only He can bring true refreshment to your parched and weary soul.

Let us pray.

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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2018

¹ John J. Davis, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "AHAB," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

² Dr. Thomas Constable's Notes on 1st Kings 17, 2017 Edition.p.73

³ Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Psalm 145".

⁴ Leviticus 11:13-15 (NLT2) "These are the birds that are detestable to you. You must never eat them: . . . ravens of all kinds . . ."

⁵ Matthew 17:3 (HCSB) Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

⁶ William H. Barnes, 1 Kings 17:1-7, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, (Tyndale House: Carol Stream, Illinois), 2012 p. 150.

⁷ Larry Kirk, "You Go Your Way; I'll Go God's Way," Preachingtoday.com.